

Message Text

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INFO AMCONSUL ALEXANDRIA
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 CAIRO 19822

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: ECON, EG
SUBJ: ECONOMIC DECISION MAKING IN EGYPT

REF: CAIRO 19377

1. THE FOLLOWING IS A DISCUSSION OF POLICY-MAKING RESPONSIBILITIES IN THE EGYPTIAN ECONOMIC FIELD WHICH MAY BE OF INTEREST TO THE PRESIDENT AS FURTHER BACKGROUND IN THE PREPARATIONS FOR THE CAMP DAVID TALKS. IT MAY BE USEFULLY READ IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE REFERENCED TELEGRAM.

2. POLITICAL DECISION MAKING IN EGYPT IS HIGHLY CENTRALIZED IN THE PERSON OF THE PRESIDENT. ECONOMIC DECISIONS, ON THE OTHER HAND, ABOVE THE LEVEL OF INDIVIDUAL FARMERS ARE TAKEN OR IMPLEMENTED BY A WIDE RANGE OF GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS, DESPITE THE CENTRALLY-PLANNED ASPECTS OF THE SYSTEM. SOME COHERENCE IS IMPARTED BY THE OPEN DOOR LIBERALIZATION POLICY PROMULGATED BY THE PRESIDENT IN
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1974, AND SADAT RETAINS A DE FACTO VETO OVER MEASURES WHICH HAVE APPARENT ADVERSE POLITICAL EFFECTS, BUT HIS SHAPING OF THE ECONOMIC SYSTEM USUALLY IS LIMITED TO BROAD CONCEPTS. OTHERS--NUMEROUS OTHERS--ADMINISTER PROGRAM DETAILS. MOST OF THESE ECONOMIC DECISIONMAKERS ARE GOVERNMENT BUREAUCRATS, OF COURSE, GIVEN THE HEAVY PUBLIC SECTOR ORIENTATION, STILL, OF THE ECONOMY. THE

RE-EMERGING PRIVATE SECTOR IS NOT YET A CRITICAL FACTOR ON THE POLICY LEVEL IN TERMS OF THE ECONOMIC ADVANCE OF THE NATION.

3. PARADOXICALLY, THERE ARE AT ONCE TOO MANY AND TOO FEW EGYPTIANS WHO DECIDE THINGS IN THE ECONOMY. THERE ARE TOO MANY IN THAT A PLETHORA OF MINISTRIES, SUB-MINISTERIAL AUTHORITIES AND PUBLIC SECTOR COMPANIES OR OTHER ENTITIES IS INVOLVED IN ECONOMIC AND DEVELOPMENTAL QUESTIONS DIRECTLY OR INDIRECTLY. COMMITTEES ABOUND AS A MEANS TO REACH CONSENSUS. THERE IS, HOWEVER, LITTLE EFFECTIVE, OVERALL COORDINATION IN THE GOVERNMENT. PRIME MINISTER SALEM, A FORMER SPECIALIST IN SECURITY MATTERS WHO IS NOT KNOWN FOR HIS ECONOMIC ACUMEN, CHAIRS A MINISTERIAL-LEVEL HIGHER COMMITTEE FOR POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC PLANNING WHICH WAS ESTABLISHED IN MAY OF THIS YEAR. THIS HIGH-LEVEL COORDINATING MECHANISM IN PRACTICE DOES NOT EXERT MUCH GUIDANCE OVER ECONOMIC QUESTIONS EXCEPT IN ISOLATED INSTANCES OF GENERAL POLICY PRONOUNCEMENTS. DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER AHMED SULTAN HEADS A SIMILAR PRODUCTION COMMITTEE IN THE CABINET; THAT BODY APPARENTLY LIMITS ITS SIGNIFICANT DECISIONS TO SULTAN'S SPECIAL FIELD OF ELECTRIC POWER. THE MINISTER OF ECONOMY IS CHAIRMAN OF A MINISTERIAL ECONOMIC COMMITTEE, ALSO ESTABLISHED IN MAY, WHICH HAS IN FACT BEEN ABLE TO IMPART A MEASURE OF POLICY DIRECTION AND PURPOSE IN FISCAL MATTERS

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BUT THUS FAR ONLY OVER A SHORT PERIOD OF TIME.

4. THERE ARE TOO FEW GOVERNMENT DECISION MAKERS IN AN INDIVIDUAL SENSE. ASSUMPTION OF RESPONSIBILITY ROUTINELY IS AVOIDED BY VIRTUALLY ALL EGYPTIAN BUREAUCRATS, NOT ONLY ON ECONOMIC MATTERS, BUT IN ALL SUBSTANTIVE AREAS OF GOVERNMENT. EVEN RELATIVELY MINOR DETAILS ARE BUMPED AS FAR UPSTAIRS AS POSSIBLE TO BE DECIDED. IT IS RARE THAT ONE FINDS A MIDDLE-LEVEL OFFICIAL WITH THE WILL--OR EXPLICIT AUTHORITY--TO REACH A CLEARCUT, FINAL DECISION ON ANYTHING WHATEVER.

5. TWO GOVERNMENT LEADERS FUNCTION AT JUST BELOW THE HIGHEST LEVELS: THE DEPUTY PRIME MINISTERS, GAMASY AND SULTAN. BOTH HAVE SUBSTANTIAL INVOLVEMENT IN ECONOMIC QUESTIONS IN PRINCIPLE--GAMASY AS HEAD ADDITIONALLY OF THE WAR PRODUCTION MINISTRY, WHICH IS ALSO ENGAGED IN PRODUCING CERTAIN CIVILIAN GOODS, AND SULTAN AS DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER TECHNICALLY "FOR PRODUCTION," AS WELL AS MINISTER FOR ELECTRICITY. NEITHER IN PRACTICE ACTUALLY DIRECTS THE ACTIVITIES OF THEIR COLLEAGUES IN OTHER MINISTRIES, HOWEVER.

6. THE LEADING MINISTER DIRECTLY RESPONSIBLE FOR POLICY IS MINISTER OF ECONOMY AND ECONOMIC COOPERATION HAMED

EL SAYEH, WHO HAS BEEN IN OFFICE SINCE LATE 1976.
DR. EL SAYEH HAS EMERGED RECENTLY AS THE CLOSEST THING
TO AN ECONOMIC CZAR THAT EGYPT NOW HAS FOLLOWING THE
RESIGNATION IN EARLY MAY OF THE THEN DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER
FOR ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL AFFAIRS KAISSOUNI (OF WHOM
MORE LATER). EL SAYEH HAS SHOWN HIMSELF TO BE A COMPETENT
AND KNOWLEDGEABLE CABINET OFFICIAL, IF NOT A PARTICULARLY
FORCEFUL ONE, OVER THE PAST NEARLY TWO YEARS, BUT IN
MEETING HIS RESPONSIBILITIES IN THE AREAS OF FISCAL AND
INVESTMENT POLICIES AND FOREIGN AID COORDINATION, HE MUST
DEAL AS A CO-EQUAL WITH THE REST OF THE CABINET. MORE
OFTEN THAN NOT, THE SPECIAL INTERESTS OF OTHER MINISTERS
ARE INIMICAL TO THOSE MINISTRY OF ECONOMY POLICIES WHICH

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C O R R E C T E D C O P Y - T E X T (PARAS 8. & 9.)

ARE DESIGNED TO BEGIN THE OVERDUE STRUCTURAL REFORMS
BEING URGED ON THE GOVERNMENT BY, AMONG OTHERS, THE IMF.

7. THERE ARE A FEW OTHER MINISTERS IN THE ECONOMIC FIELD
WORTHY OF MENTION IN TERMS OF DEMONSTRATED COMPETENCE.
AMONG THESE ARE INDUSTRY, PETROLEUM AND MINING MINISTER
HILAL AND TRADE MINISTER TEWFIK. IMPRESSIVE NEWCOMERS
TO THE CABINET ARE TRANSPORT & COMMUNICATIONS MINISTER
ABU TALEB AND AGRICULTURE MINISTER DAOUD, BOTH OF WHOM
SEEM TO BE ACTIVISTS BY NATURE. THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE,
WHICH ORDINARILY WOULD BE A KEY PORTFOLIO, IS HEADED BY

AN ABLE BUT SOMEWHAT RETIRING TECHNOCRAT. THE MINISTRY OF PLANNING, ANOTHER POTENTIALLY IMPORTANT AGENCY, IS HEADED BY AN ARTICULATE, EXPERIENCED ECONOMIST WHO UNFORTUNATELY SEEMS TO LACK INTELLECTUAL DEPTH AND COMMITMENT TO PUBLIC SERVICE. THE REST OF THE CABINET MEMBERS CONCERNED WITH ECONOMIC QUESTIONS, SEVERAL OF WHOM HAVE BEEN AROUND FOR TWO OR THREE YEARS, ARE NEAR CIPHERS AS FAR AS ACTIVE
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POLICY DIRECTION IS CONCERNED. THE GOVERNOR OF THE CENTRAL BANK, IN THE NATURE OF THE SYSTEM, EXERCISES LITTLE INFLUENCE IN THE ECONOMIC POLICY FIELD.

8. THE EGYPTIAN GOVERNMENT ENJOYED THE SERVICES OF DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER KAISOUNI, AN INTERNATIONALLY-RESPECTED FINANCIAL FIGURE AND FORMER CABINET MEMBER, FROM LATE 1976 UNTIL MID-1978. DURING THAT PERIOD, KAISOUNI MANAGED TO IMPART AN UNUSUAL SENSE OF PURPOSE TO ECONOMIC POLICY, EVEN THOUGH HE HAD DIRECT AUTHORITY OVER A GROUPING OF ONLY FOUR MINISTRIES (PETROLEUM AND INDUSTRY, FOR EXAMPLE, DID NOT COME UNDER HIS PURVIEW). EGYPT MANAGED TO BETTER ITS EXTERNAL FINANCIAL CONDITION CONSIDERABLY UNDER HIS STEWARDSHIP, DUE MAINLY TO LARGE TRANSFERS OF OPEC ARAB RESOURCES, BUT ALSO AS A CONSEQUENCE OF HIS POLICY DIRECTION AND INTERNATIONAL REPUTATION FOR PROBITY. DR. KAISOUNI RECENTLY WAS IN EFFECT DROPPED FROM THE CABINET, HOWEVER, MUCH TO THE SURPRISE OF EVERYONE, DUE TO MINISTERIAL DISPUTES AND RIVALRY FOR ECONOMIC LEADERSHIP WITH PRIME MINISTER SALEM, AS PERCEIVED BY SALEM. SOME OF THAT PURPOSEFUL LEADERSHIP FORTUNATELY SURVIVES IN THE PERSON OF ECONOMY MINISTER EL SAYEH, A LONG-TIME KAISOUNI PROTOGE.

9. BELOW THE CABINET LEVEL IN GOVERNMENT AND AMONG PUBLIC SECTOR ORGANIZATIONS, IDENTIFIABLE, FORCEFUL ECONOMIC LEADERSHIP IS EVEN SKIMPIER. CONSIDERABLE NUMBERS OF MIDDLE-LEVEL AND SENIOR CIVIL SERVANTS ARE TECHNICALLY COMPETENT IN THEIR FIELDS, BUT FEW HAVE A SIGNIFICANT AMOUNT OF INFLUENCE OVER POLICY QUESTIONS OR WILL READILY TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR DECISIONS. THE MINISTRIES OF PETROLEUM, ELECTRICITY, TRADE AND SUPPLY ARE REASONABLY WELL STAFFED WITH SENIOR EMPLOYEES CAPABLE OF REACHING SUBORDINATE PROGRAM-LEVEL DECISIONS, AS IS THE
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MINISTRY OF ECONOMY. FINANCE, HOUSING AND AGRICULTURE ARE AMONG THOSE LESS WELL OFF IN THIS RESPECT. OTHER GOVERN-

MENT MINISTRIES SUCH AS PLANNING, INDUSTRY AND TOURISM ARE CLOSE TO HOPELESS. AMONG THE MANY AUTONOMOUS GOVERNMENT AGENCIES, ONLY THE ELECTRIC POWER AUTHORITY, THE CIVIL AVIATION ORGANIZATION, THE SUEZ CANAL AUTHORITY AND THE GENERAL PETROLEUM CORPORATION COME TO MIND AS BEING REASONABLY WELL SUPPLIED WITH COMPETENT TECHNICIANS NOT RELUCTANT TO DECIDE MATTERS AT THEIR LEVEL OF RESPONSIBILITY. PUBLIC SECTOR INDUSTRY, CONSISTING OF NEARLY 400 PRODUCTION COMPANIES OF VARIOUS SIZES, ON PAPER HAS BEEN DECENTRALIZED TO A CONSIDERABLE EXTENT IN THE PAST TWO YEARS. GOVERNMENT PRICING POLICIES INHIBIT INDEPENDENT OPERATION BY COMPANY MANAGEMENT, HOWEVER, AND ONLY A HANDFUL OF PUBLIC SECTOR FIRMS OF THAT LARGE TOTAL SHOW SIGNS OF STRONG MANAGERIAL DIRECTION.

10. THE EFFECT OF THIS STRUCTURE AND STYLE OF LEADERSHIP HAS BEEN TO SLOW THE PACE OF DECISION MAKING AS CONCERNS DOMESTIC ECONOMIC AFFAIRS AND TO COMPLICATE EXTERNAL RELATIONSHIPS WITH, AS A PRIME EXAMPLE, FOREIGN AID DONORS (THE U. S. DEFINITELY INCLUDED). PRESIDENT SADAT MAY PROPOSE IN POLICY TERMS, BUT THE BUREAUCRACY USUALLY DISPOSES. THE NEARLY TWO DOZEN MINISTRIES WITH AT LEAST AN INDIRECT INTEREST IN ECONOMIC POLICY QUESTIONS TEND TO FOLLOW THEIR OWN COURSES--WITHIN THE BROAD FRAMEWORK OF SADAT'S LIBERALIZATION POLICIES, TO BE SURE--UNTRAMMELED BY GOVERNMENT-WIDE COORDINATION. THE MINISTERS THEMSELVES, WHO COME AND GO WITH RAPIDITY IN MANY CASES, OFTEN PURSUE POLICIES ON WHICH THEY HAVE ONLY THE SKETCHIEST OF DETAILED GUIDANCE FROM ON HIGH. PUBLIC SECTOR ORGANIZATIONS, ESPECIALLY INDUSTRIAL PRODUCTION COMPANIES, ARE EVEN FARTHER REMOVED FROM MEANINGFUL POLICY CONTROLS. (WE NOTE HERE PARENTHETICALLY, HOWEVER, THAT THERE HAS BEEN A GENERALLY GROWING SENSE OF CONSTANCY OF DIRECTION IN OPENING UP THE ECONOMY IN RECENT YEARS, CONFIDENTIAL

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ESPECIALLY AT THE MINISTERIAL AND SENIOR CIVIL SERVANT

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LEVEL. AS CABINET RESHUFFLES HAVE TAKEN PLACE AND AS TIME HAS PASSED SINCE THE OPEN DOOR WAS PROMULGATED, GRADUALLY MORE AND MORE MINISTERS IN TUNE WITH SADAT'S LIBERALIZATION MOVES HAVE COME TO POSITIONS OF AUTHORITY; MORE AND MORE SENIOR OFFICIALS HAVE RISEN TO RESPONSIBLE POSTS WHO ARE IN SYMPATHY WITH THE NEED FOR GREATER EFFICIENCY IN RESOURCE ALLOCATION IN THE DEVELOPMENT PROCESS, AS CONTRASTED WITH AN EARLIER COMMITMENT, IN NASSER'S TIME, TO MAJOR ENGINEERING OR INDUSTRIAL WORKS REQUIRING MASSIVE INDIVIDUAL INVESTMENTS.)

11. EGYPT'S WEAK ECONOMIC DECISION-MAKING MECHANISMS AFFECT, IN PERHAPS ASCENDING ORDER OF SIGNIFICANCE, A) THE ADMINISTRATION OF OUR AID PROGRAM, B) THE EGYPTIAN GOVERNMENT'S ABILITY TO MANAGE ITS EXTERNAL FINANCIAL AFFAIRS, AND C) THE SADAT ADMINISTRATION'S PROSPECTS FOR PROMOTING ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF THE SORT THAT WILL BENEFIT THE MASSES. OUR LARGE AID PROGRAM HAS FACED EGYPTIAN BUREAUCRATIC PROBLEMS, AS WELL AS ECONOMIC ABSORPTIVE LIMITATIONS, OVER THE PAST FOUR YEARS WHICH HAVE REQUIRED CONFIDENTIAL

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CONCERTED MANAGEMENT EFFORTS ON OUR PART TO REACH THE PRESENT LEVEL OF SUBSTANTIAL LARGE-SCALE BUT CAREFULLY JUSTIFIED DISBURSEMENTS. RECURRENT FINANCIAL CRISES HAVE BEEN THE NORM OVER MOST OF THE PAST FEW YEARS, AND THESE HAVE DERIVED IN LARGE PART FROM UNCOORDINATED DIRECTION OF EGYPT'S FOREIGN DEBT OBLIGATIONS AND DOMESTIC PRICE POLICIES; AS WE HAVE NOTED ELSEWHERE, HOWEVER, THIS SITUATION HAS CLEARED UP FOR THE MOMENT, AGAIN IN PART DUE TO AN IMPROVEMENT (BEGUN UNDER KAISSOUNI) IN GOVERNMENT POLICY-LEVEL CONTROLS. FINALLY, LACK OF COORDINATION AND UNCLEAR POLICY GUIDANCE OBVIOUSLY VITIATES EGYPTIAN EFFORTS AT BROAD-BASED DEVELOPMENT OF THE ECONOMY,

IF FOR NO OTHER REASON THAN THAT THE MOBILIZATION AND ALLOCATION OF RESOURCES IS CARRIED OUT INEFFICIENTLY; THE BENEFITS OF SUCH DEVELOPMENT CLEARLY ARE NEEDED BY SADAT TO BOLSTER HIS SUPPORT AMONG THE EGYPTIAN POPULACE WHILE HE PURSUES HIS POLITICAL INITIATIVES.

12. IN SUM, DECISION-MAKING AT HIGHER LEVELS IN THE GOVERNMENT-DOMINATED EGYPTIAN ECONOMY TENDS TO BE DIFFUSED, POORLY COORDINATED, LACKING IN CLEAR GUIDANCE FROM SUPERIOR AUTHORITY AND UNRESPONSIVE TO OUT-OF-THE-ORDINARY REQUIREMENTS. BUCK PASSING IS A WELL-DEVELOPED BUREAUCRATIC ART; INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITY FOR DECISIONS NORMALLY IS ACCEPTED ONLY IF IMPOSSIBLE TO AVOID. THE EXTENSIVE USE OF GOVERNMENT COMMITTEES IS A DEVICE DESIGNED AT LEAST AS MUCH TO ARRIVE AT COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY FOR DECISIONS AS IT IS TO REACH A CONSENSUS ON FEASIBLE, PREFERRED COURSES OF ACTION. EGYPT IS NOT, OF COURSE, UNUSUAL IN THESE SEVERAL RESPECTS: MUCH THE SAME CAN BE SAID IN VARYING DEGREES ABOUT VIRTUALLY EVERY OTHER UNDERDEVELOPED NATION ON EARTH. EGYPT THUS STRUGGLES WITH DEVELOPMENT PROBLEMS UNDER THE KINDS OF

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POLICY-IMPLEMENTATION HANDICAPS COMMON TO MANY OF THE EMERGING THIRD WORLD COUNTRIES. FURTHER, ONE MAY NOTE THAT EGYPTIAN ECONOMIC DECISION MAKERS, NOTWITHSTANDING THE SYSTEM'S LEADERSHIP FAILINGS AND THE MANY DEVELOPMENT PROBLEMS, MAY BE GRADUALLY BEGINNING TO DO SOMETHING RIGHT, WITNESS THE MARKEDLY IMPROVED FINANCIAL PICTURE AND THE HIGH GROWTH RATE IN THE ECONOMY OVER THE RECENT PAST. EILTS

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